

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH CAPTAIN TREVOR HALL, PILOT IN
COMMAND OF THE C-130 TRANSPORTATION AIRCRAFT FLYING RELIEF SUPPLIES TO BURMA
SUBJECT: U.S. RELIEF SHIPMENTS TO BURMA TIME: 9:00 A.M. EDT DATE: WEDNESDAY, MAY
14, 2008

Copyright (c) 2008 by Federal News Service, Inc., Ste. 500 1000 Vermont Avenue,
NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA. Federal News Service is a private firm not
affiliated with the federal government. No portion of this transcript may be
copied, sold or retransmitted without the written authority of Federal News
Service, Inc. Copyright is not claimed as to any part of the original work
prepared by a United States government officer or employee as a part of that
person's official duties. For information on subscribing to the FNS Internet
Service, please visit <http://www.fednews.com> or call (202) 347-1400

(Note: Please refer to www.dod.mil for more information.)

CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (Chief, New Media Operations, Office of the
Assistant Secretary of Defense Public Affairs): With us on the line this
morning we've got Captain Trevor Hall, who's the United States Air Force pilot
who flew the first C-130 into -- it was Rangoon, was it not?

CAPT. HALL: Yes.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Captain -- into Rangoon for the Burma relief effort.
So Captain, welcome to the Bloggers Roundtable this morning. Thank you very much
for joining us.

CAPT. HALL: Thank you for having me. MR. HOLT: All right. And do
you have anything you want to start us out with, or are we just going to move
right into questions and answers?

CAPT. HALL: Well, we can just go ahead and go right into questions and
answers. That's fine with me.

MR. HOLT: Okay. All right.

Well, David, you were first on the line, David Axe with War Is Boring.
David, why don't you get us started?

Q Yeah, David Axe with War Is Boring.

I want to cover some of the just basics, but I don't want these to
count as my questions. (Laughter.) So when was the flight? Where did you fly
from? How many people were in your crew, and what were you carrying?

CAPT. HALL: Okay. Well, the first flight that we took that I piloted
in was on Monday. We took off out of U-Tapao, Thailand. It's a Vietnam-era
base the United States used in the Vietnam War, but now it's a Thai air force
base. And we took off out of there for about an hour-and-45-minute flight into
Rangoon, or Yangon, as they call it. And we landed there about 2:00 in the
afternoon local Burma time.

We had six basic crew members and two maintainers on board in case
anything was to go -- just in case anything was going to go wrong with our

plane. Besides that, we also had on board some people to go and talk to the Burmese government. We had Admiral Timothy Keating, who is the commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific. And we also had Mrs. Henrietta Fore, who is the director of the USAID agency.

On board the plane, we took about 30,000 pounds of bottled water and mosquito nets and blankets for the first plane in. And I think that was all your questions. Was there anything else?

Q Right, so my real question then. So was the plan all along that you would be able to land and drop off supplies? Was there ever a plan to air-drop supplies just in case that were necessary?

CAPT. HALL: We came prepared with everything that we possibly might need to do. So we were ready if that's what the plan was. But as far as everything that we heard on our side, even though we came prepared for that, that's never what the actual plan was going to be.

Q So what I really want to know is, in the event that you needed to air-drop supplies, were there any plans to use that GPS- guided system to precision-bomb your humanitarian supplies to the refugees and the folks in need?

CAPT. HALL: Yes, that definitely would be a possibility. We have that capability, and our crews are trained up with that capability. So, you know, one of the hold-backs from that is there's a couple of different ways you can do it. We do it -- you can do it with GPS-guided chutes, or we will also drop precision wind analysis instruments and then take that back to our computer and then do -- they're more precision drops, but they're not GPS-guided. And that's really -- there's not a lot of GPS chutes available, but right now they're very expensive. And so the majority of the stuff that we have been doing with that has just been with increased wind analysis.

Q Okay, thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Jason.

Q Hi. I was hoping to get some other background information as well. As far as the origin of the flights from the United States, I was told that they had stationed out of California by C-17 to go to Thailand. Do you know about the beginning part of this (leg ?), if it was flying out of California?

CAPT. HALL: I'm not exactly sure where all the supplies from USAID came for. I know that some of them came -- a lot of them came on C-17s from Thailand -- or, I mean, from California. We've also brought in a bunch of people from Guam, as well as the Air Force has what they call basically a group that's ready to go into -- a disaster relief group that's ready to go in at a moment's notice. And we brought in a lot of them and their equipment from Guam and into Thailand to stage.

However, our planes, all the Air Force C-130s that are here are all normally stationed in Tokyo at Yokota Air Base. And we flew in -- actually, it was kind of an interesting situation. We were already in Thailand supporting a Marine exercise called Cobra Gold, and we were getting ready to go back home to Tokyo when all this kind of kicked off. And so for the last about 10 days, they told us to just sit tight and wait to go in. We've been standing on alert for about the last 10 days, ready to go in at a moment's notice.

Q That's very interesting stuff. Can I ask a quick second question? When you landed in Burma, was there any difficulties coordinating with the Burmese officials at the airport? Was it pretty smooth as far as getting authorization to land without undue security concerns?

CAPT. HALL: As a matter of fact, it was a lot easier than we expected it to be. We didn't know exactly what to expect crossing over in there, what the air traffic control, you know, overall picture would look like and how the airport would handle us and if they were used to handling United States Air Force -- just traffic like us in general. And we were quite surprised to find out that it was much better than we expected, and we had no problem at all. We were received very graciously, actually. And then we were -- I mean, obviously they knew we were coming, and they'd been planning for us. Q Thanks very much.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Austin.

Q Yeah, could you -- I want a freebie question. Which squadron are you, Captain Hall?

CAPT. HALL: The squadron that I'm in is the 36th Airlift Squadron based in Yokota Air Base, Japan.

Q 36th?

CAPT. HALL: Yes.

Q Okay. Rangoon International Airport, is it capable of handling a major relief mission? It sounds like you were -- you said you were pleasantly surprised at how efficient they were when they were prepared for you. Is the facility big enough to handle a C-17 an hour?

CAPT. HALL: Yes. It very easily handled a C-17 or KC-10, you know, which is like a DC-10. There would be no problems with handling the large amount of traffic or even ramp space. The one problem that they would have, though, is their offload capability is very limited. They didn't have, for instance, forklifts or any type of equipment that was really easy for them to offload our planes.

And the plane ended up being hand-offloaded.

Q Did you turn over the aid to the military? Who did you interface with when you were at Rangoon? Was it the Burmese military that took the supplies?

CAPT. HALL: Yes, it was all military-controlled. And even though not everyone was in uniform, they were all wearing white T-shirts that had some things written on them. And from what I understand, and as we were talking to the people there, some of the U.S. representatives that we met on the ground, everyone that was wearing those T-shirts was still military. They just weren't in a formal uniform.

Q Okay, I got -- your route in and out, did you happen to fly over the cyclone-devastated area? And if you did, what were your impressions of it?

CAPT. HALL: Yes, we did -- even as we were flying in, the majority of our route, once we crossed over the border, you could see the amount of devastation that the country had defaced. There was a massive amount of flooding. Even still, the area was just -- lots of standing water. It was obvious to see many trees had been tossed over and houses that had been knocked down. And obviously, from our perspective, it looked like not very much had been done to really get any of that cleaned out at this time.

One of the other weird things that we thought too was something that you wouldn't normally think about, as we were flying in, we were looking down probably from about 1,000 to 2,000 feet as we were getting ready to descend into the airport, and we noticed that even though there looked like there was a lot of main roads around the airport, even just all around the country as we were flying in, there was little if any traffic. I think we saw maybe one car -- I mean, a truck on the road at the time.

Q All right. See, that leads to one last follow-up question. Even if you could get it into the airport, did they have the infrastructure -- if a massive air relief -- do they have the infrastructure to distribute the relief supplies, based on what you saw or what you know? CAPT. HALL: Based on what I saw, I really don't think they have the infrastructure to handle that type of -- I think really it would take a lot of people to -- a lot of people and a lot of resources to be able to distribute it the way it needs to be distributed.

Q Thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And Maggie. Maggie, you still with us?

Q I am.

Did you leave anybody on the ground, sir, any Americans?

CAPT. HALL: No, we didn't leave any Americans on the ground. However, there were people there from -- there were some people that met us at the plane. I'm not sure who all of them were. I know one for sure; there was an Air Force lieutenant colonel who is an air attache at the embassy there in Rangoon. There was also an Army colonel that I saw, but I never got to actually meet him, as well as a few other Americans that were there, that I'm assuming all of them were working out of the embassy in Rangoon.

Q Okay, and a quick follow-up. Did you have to tell the Burmese government who you were bringing in, in specific? I'm wondering if they knew Admiral Keating was with you.

CAPT. HALL: Oh, absolutely, they knew he was with us. He was met by, from what I understand, the commander of their navy at the plane. And so they were very ready for him to be received. They met us and showered him with gifts, and it was a huge military welcoming, if you will, for him as well as Ms. Henrietta Fore.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Bruce.

Q Yeah, Bruce McCormick -- (inaudible). How long were you on the ground? And has there been any follow-on traffic? Have we been shipping more in by airlift?

CAPT. HALL: Actually, we went in, and it was a single plane that we took in on Monday. Since then, the Marines took in two planes on Tuesday carrying a lot of similar stuff that we were carrying. And then, as far as I've heard today, we had one Air Force C-130 and, from what they tell me, four Marine C-130s that went in. So it's starting to ramp up a little bit as far as what we're getting in there. And the stuff that they were carrying today was medical supplies, plastic sheeting -- (inaudible) -- kits, some food, and first aid material as well.

Another interesting thing, too, that's interesting to note, while we were -- when we landed, I didn't exactly know what to expect as far as what else would be on the ramp there at the airport. But we landed and there was another C-130 from the Hellenic air force, the Greek air force there, as well as two Malaysian C-130s and some Indian planes as well.

Q What was the first one? You said something and then Greek?

CAPT. HALL: The Hellenic Air Force. It's the Greek air force --

Q Oh, okay.

CAPT. HALL: The Hellenic Air Force.

Q All right. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And Grim.

Q This is Grim with blackfive.net. I would like to ask you about the role of the Thai government and the Thai-American alliance in making this happen. What can you tell us about that?

CAPT. HALL: Well, you know Admiral Keating has worked a lot with the Thai government in order to facilitate all of us to be able to stage out of the bases that we're staging out of. And, of course, the Marines were already doing exercise when this kicked off, and so they had a bunch of assets forward-positioned at bases up in Korat and as well as U-Tapao, which are, you know, pretty close to the vicinity around Bangkok. In the time, also, since before this has kicked off on Monday, we had been sending crews and different people to work with the government of Thailand to look at other bases and other airports or landing strips or forward operating bases around closer to the border of Burma in order to facilitate -- like for the Marines to get in with helicopters and make short trips to distribute goods.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. We had a couple of other folks join us. Who else is with us?

Q Hey, Jack. Andrew.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Andrew. Go ahead.

Q Sir, Andrew Lubin from Military Observer. Two-part question. How long were you on the ground actually? And did you take Admiral Keating and Ms. Sua (ph) back with you?

CAPT. HALL: Yes, we were on the ground for approximately two hours, just over two hours. And the first hour was spent unloading all the supplies that we'd brought in because they did have to hand- offload all of the cargo. And they offloaded it all directly off of our plane and placed it into military trucks and drove it to a different staging area on the airport. Admiral Keating and one of the members from the Thai government, as well as Ms. Henrietta Fore went in as soon as we landed to meet with Burmese government officials that were there to meet them. And they were in there for about two hours, and so as soon as they came out, that's when we took them. We took off again and I actually dropped them back off in Bangkok to do some more talking and negotiations, I guess, with the Thai government to further coordinate some of this relief effort.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And anyone else?

Q Yeah. Brian Jordan, military.com.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Brian. Go ahead.

Q I apologize for getting in a few minutes late, but what was the purpose of Admiral Keating's fly-in with you on this? Why did --

CAPT. HALL: What was the purpose of his flight?

Q Yes, of him going in with this relief flight. Was there something -- (background noise). CAPT. HALL: He went in specifically to negotiate with the government to figure out exactly what they would allow us to do. He delivered a letter to them from the United States -- I believe it was the State Department, stating that, you know, we had no harsh intentions and -- you know, they've been very wary of us going into their country feeling like -- you know the last type of country that we went into, I guess, like this -- you know, in large force like this was, at least from their perspective, was, you know, Iraq. And so, they're pretty uncomfortable about having a large military presence there. And he just went in to assure them that it was not -- you know, our intentions -- what our intentions were, that we wouldn't be sending in any planes with any kind of weapons or armament on them. And that -- you know, basically, just for them to -- hopefully they'll coordinate with them to let them know that we just wanted to help.

Q And finally, since -- again, I apologize for my lateness. But you mentioned a Ms. Henrietta. Who is that?

CAPT. HALL: Mrs. Henrietta Fore, she's the director of USAID.

Q Okay.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Anyone else with us?

Q Thank you.

Q Chuck Simmins from America's North Shore Journal.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Chuck. Go ahead.

Q Captain, if you haven't already, how about giving us the names and ranks and crew positions for your crew so they get a little recognition?

CAPT. HALL: Sure. We took in -- I was the aircraft commander and the pilot is Captain Trevor Hall, that was me. And then the co-pilot was Lieutenant Buck Kozlowski, that's k o z l o w s k i. The navigator on board was Gregg Judd (sp), Captain Gregg Judd (sp). The engineer that we took with us was Sergeant Robert White. And then took two -- what's that? (Off mike consultation.) And then we had two load masters, and the load masters were Airman Daniel Morinson (sp) and Airman Robert Boar (sp).

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Anyone else?

Q Could I sneak in again Jack?

MR. HOLT: Sure.

Q -- this is Maggie. Captain Hall, you were talking about how suspicious the Burmese government is of us. If -- at the very beginning, when the question came up about precision bombing in aid, you mentioned something about dropping, something about wind -- I'm sorry. I have no military experience whatever, wind instrument. You were going to possibly drop wind instruments? Did I hear that correctly?

CAPT. HALL: Oh, well, what we were talking about -- and that was a little off subject -- is that just recently -- and it's a little bit -- it's been used widely in Afghanistan and then a little bit in Iraq as well -- the Air Force has developed the ability to drop precision -- you know, we've had the ability to drop precision missiles or precision bombs for many years now.

And so the talk has come and they finally developed precision air drops which is our, basically GPS-guided parachutes that will -- you know, based on wind data -- the way that it works is we throw out, basically a big streamer that is connected to the GPS and will send back data to a computer on the plane that tells us exactly what the winds are from all the way up from as high altitude that we're dropping it, all the way down to the ground. And then that will send via computer and via radio frequency to a GPS-guided chute and tell it how to steer to get down to the ground.

And that's one of the -- the question was if we were planning on using that capability over there if we needed to -- over here, actually. And right now, we're not seeing the need to use that capability.

Q Jack, I have another question.

MR. HOLT: Okay, go ahead.

Q Yes, Captain Hall, in your briefing or maybe Admiral Keating said something about it on the flight back -- if you could tell us, I'd be interested in knowing. There are vast differences in the estimates of the number of dead, missing and then homeless or displaced. And the reason those are critical is not only just because they're human lives but it gives you some idea of how large a disaster you're dealing with, and if you really were going to provide aid, how significant the effort would be. Did you get a briefing on Monday

about the number of dead and missing? And if so, what were those figures and some idea of the number of people that are homeless because of the cyclone?

CAPT. HALL: You know, we didn't. While it was talked about a lot, no one gave any significant numbers or anything that was -- anyone said, this, you know, this is a good estimate of how many people --

Q Right.

CAPT. HALL: -- have actually died or how many people are misplaced. The majority of the briefings that we got prior to going in focused on -- to, you know, for -- to be honest with you, on, you know, what's going to be the worst case scenario, what happens if they decide that they don't -- you know, we land and they don't want our stuff or we land and they decide they want to impound our plane, or, you know, keep us in custody for a while.

And we talked a lot about all those things. And so -- you know, to be -- as a crew, we kind of went in with the worst case scenario in mind, and when we were received so warmly on the ground, it was a great sigh of relief to be honest with you.

Everyone that was there was so ecstatic or excited to have us on the ground, even the people that -- even the military people. It seemed like everyone that we came in contact with, at least maybe one in every three people had cameras -- they wanted to take their pictures with us; they wanted to take pictures of the plane and us. And with the very little broken English that we could make out, they were trying to say is that they would just say, please bring more, please bring more.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q I've got a -- Jack, I've got a follow-up -- Andrew again.

MR. HOLT: Okay, go ahead.

Q Andrew Lubin, again, military observer.

You were in Thailand to support Cobra Gold. What would you have been doing with them?

CAPT. HALL: What have I been doing since then?

Q No, what would you have doing had you not been diverted for the -- you know, for rescue flight?

CAPT. HALL: What would I have been doing -- I don't know if I understand the question -- what would I be -- what would I have -- Q You know, had you not ended up doing this on Monday, what -- you say you were standing by because of this -- what were the plans for you to work with the Marines in Cobra Gold?

CAPT. HALL: Oh, well, really what we were -- we were just ferrying Marines into the exercise, really, just really troop transport -- not a whole lot of actual participation in the exercise as much as just a troop movement for them to come here to Thailand to do their exercise.

Q Okay.

MR. HOLT: All right. Anybody else?

Q Yeah, Jack. Chuck Simmins, again.

Captain, you said that the primary problem on the ground was their lack of capability for unloading the aircraft. Would your aircraft be able to ferry in forklifts and that type of machinery if it was necessary, or would they need a larger aircraft for that?

CAPT. HALL: No, absolutely. We -- my -- the aircraft that I flew in, the C-130, you know, if you're familiar, is -- it's one of the smallest transport planes that the Air Force has compared to some of the, you know, the really large ones like the C-17 and the C-5. But, yes, definitely we would have been able to take in forklifts. We are big enough to carry in forklifts as well as, you know, tail loaders which are machines specialized at pulling pallets off the aircraft. And not only that, but we heard plenty of talk from people on the ground here in Thailand saying that the United States would be more than willing to donate this equipment to them for the -- to facilitate the offloading of planes which -- if they will just give us the permission.

Q Okay.

And one more completely unrelated follow-up. Would you be able to land your C-130 on an aircraft carrier, Captain?

CAPT. HALL: (Laughs.) It's been done in the past.

Q Yeah.

CAPT. HALL: Maybe -- but I don't know if I specifically would be able to do it. I would hope that I can. I can land it on a pretty small strip. I've landed a -- you know, a 60 feet wide and about 2,500 feet long before in Afghanistan plenty of times, so --

Q Thank you.

Q Captain, do you have any pictures you can send back to us? I'm sure we'd all like to get some out as we get these articles up and running this afternoon.

MR. HOLT: I had -- yeah, Andrew, I had sent -- he had sent some up through the PA, the Air Force Public Affairs. And I've sent out a couple this morning. We're working on getting a couple of more authorized for release.

Q Jack, I have one other personal question. May I ask it?

MR. HOLT: Sure.

Q Captain Hall, where are you from originally and how'd you get your commission?

CAPT. HALL: I was born in St. Louis Park, Minnesota, but I grew up the majority of my life in Rigby, Idaho which is a small town just outside of Idaho Falls, Idaho in Southeastern Idaho -- the majority of my -- all through elementary school and high school there. But I got my commission at the United States Air Force Academy.

Q Okay.

MR. HOLT: All right. Okay. Anything else?

Wrapping this up right now; just about out of time.

Okay, thank you very much, Captain Hall, for joining us this morning.
We appreciate your time and your service and your help. Thank you very much.

CAPT. HALL: Thank you.

Q Thank you.

Q Thank you.

Q Captain, thank you.

END.